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THE LOVE TOKEN.

CHRISTMAS IN THE FIELDS.

In his stirring picture of "Christmas in the Fields," Mr. John S. Davis shows that he has made a careful study of American farm-life in all of its picturesque details; catching in this wild out-of-doors scene, the exact spirit of Nature. The sturdy farmer in the foreground, with the armful of fresh hay, golden and green, drawn from the interior of the stack where it was beyond the reach of the cows, or brought from the barn probably not far away, looks as if he might say, with Bayard Taylor, to the winds of December:

"Give me your chill and wild embrace,
And pour your baptism on my face;
Sound in mine ears the airy moan
That sweeps in desolate monotone,
Where on the unsheltered hill-top beat
The marches of your homeless feet!"

What has that man to fear who stands face to face with Nature when she frowns upon him, or blows her icy blasts from the north, or sifts down deep, impenetrable snows, or thunders in wrath, and flashes forth with consuming power all the fires of the universe?

The winters are so long and severe in New England, and some portions of the Middle States, it is not usual to leave the cattle out of doors, unless, it may be, for a few hours at midday. Our "Christmas in the Fields" shows a driving snow-storm, when the clouds of December are dark on the hills, and the bare-limbed trees incessantly roar. All the spirits of the storm are abroad, black, white and gray, mingling in a wild dance. How the snow flies from every wisp of hay, every twig of tree, every fence post, and whirls and waltzes along the ground in front of the cattle! The dog, crouching, trembling, shows that the blast pierces to his bones. The black and ominous crow flies moodily over the snow-clad fields, hopelessly seeking a morsel of food, having been frightened away from the stack by the presence of the farmer. How eagerly the cattle press forward to get a mouthful of the dainty morsel the happy farmer brings! The brim of his heart, with its tropical fullness of life, overflows with affection for the dumb animals in his care, and his chief delight during the long winter is to look after their comfort. As Miss Proctor sings:

"Let us throw more logs on the fire!
We have need of a cheerful light,
And close round the hearth to gather,
For the wind has risen to-night.
It has been on the lonely moorland,
Where the treacherous snow-drift lies,
Where the traveler, spent and weary,
Gasp'd fainter and fainter cries."

In pleasing and delightful contrast with the winter scene, Mr. Davis has given us a broad view of the near approach of spring, when the old apple orchard is covered with blossoms as if they were snow — when the warm sunlight dapples the hill-side, and the doves are flying in the air, cooing to each other their tales of mutual affection. Has not the poet told us:

"In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast;
In the spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest;
In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove?"

The anxious crisis of the spring is past, and warmth is master over the lingering cold, else the old white-haired farmer would hardly venture outside of his barn hatless. The air grows warm, and buds increase; the sky of winter has been pierced that spring may issue forth. We can almost hear the alder's catkins



THE LITTLE BROTHER.

drop, see the maple cast his crimson bloom, and the willow's downy gold blow wide. The white oak's foxy leaves appear softer than a squirrel's ear, and there is motion in the soil—a sound lighter than falling seeds shook out of flowers. As we look upon the picture of "Old Friends," (opposite page 209,) our heart kindles with sympathizing emotions, and we rejoice with man and beast.

The old man and his faithful mare look as if they might have been young together. She has done her master faithful service, in the field and on the road; she has always been a patient, steady animal, ever ready to take the family to church, to jog to the

mill, to go after the doctor or clergyman. Even the children have more than once clambered up her sides and seated themselves on her back. To-day the old man and the old horse are rejoicing together. The winter has been a long one, and both man and beast are glad to get out into the sunshine, if only to hold a little converse with each other, feel the warm air, hear the birds twitter, and wait patiently for the day when the fields shall be clothed in emerald green. It may be the white-haired patriarch has been left alone in the world, and is now glad to find companionship with those lower animals, horses and dogs, which are faithful to one as long as life lasts.

While the old horse is content to receive the caresses of her master, and the younger and more spirited animal gazes into the distance, the colt hastens to eat the golden corn which has been brought into the yard as a dainty bit for the household favorite. One of the most characteristic features of this beautiful picture is the wolfish and ungainly looking dog, engaged in the not very graceful act of scratching his ear. It is such touches of real life as this which give Mr. Davis's pictures their peculiar home-like charm, appealing at once to the hearts of all who see them. The grouping of the whole picture is natural and life-like, giving evidence of artistic genius.